CHEAP TRUTH

EDITORIAL. Ghettos are insular places. The antics of ghetto elders or sinister youth gangs may assume absurd importance to a degraded and indigent populace. In their wretched haste to eke out a living, they may forget that the outside world exists.

This is modern SF's predicament. Extrapolations, that once held some intellectual validity, have now become distorted folk tales, passed down through generations. SF's vision of the future has become a Punch and Judy show, ritualized, predictable, and fit only for children.

This is not due to latter-day decadence. It is the result of a profound terror of the future and what it holds, a fin-de-millenaire obsession with apocalypse. Reader and author alike wrap themselves in escapist nonsense, quilted up from rags and tatters of jingoist imperial Americana or the comfortable minutiae of technical obsession.

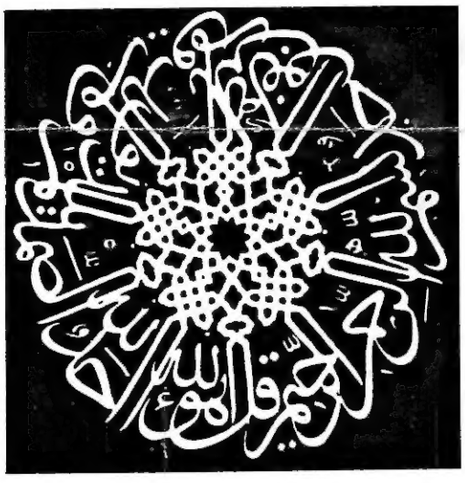
Yet this represents a profound abdication of SF's role in society. It is as if the scouts of a panic-stricken army had retreated to an obscure corner of camp.

Attempts to actually go out and survey the territory are rejected out of hand: too difficult, too dangerous, too depressing. Too much hard work. It's easier to exploit the panic: either by adding to it with the latest gray dystopia, or by preying on the terror of a demoralized readership by offering cathartic power fantasies.

To survive and revitalize itself, SF must find new visions of the human future. Never mind that 40-year-old crap about atomic armageddon. If we can't see any farther than that, then we will have added to the apathy and fatalism that are the allies of destruction.

Think of it as an act of self-preservation. In the case of any profound disruption of society, our snug little ghetto will be the first to go. It's up to us to look for ways out. If not us, who?

As a first step in this daunting and worthy task, CHEAP TRUTH offers the following guideposts in the wilderness.



SQUIRMING MAGS: Second Installment.
Social and Political Issues.

AFKAR INQUIRY, 55 Banner St., London EC1Y 8PX. Single issues US$2.50, UK 80p.
Perhaps the first order of business is to destroy our preconceptions and few magazines could be better fitted for that than AFKAR. Imagine an English-language magazine by radical fundamentalist Islamic futurists. Essays on Koranic epistemology alternate with analyses of Alvin Toffler and solar-age, small-is-beautiful manifestos. The upshot is little short of staggering: defiant, militant, self-contradictory, blazing with dangerous energies. Those who think of the Muslim Resurgence as a vaguely comic medieval anomaly should read this post-haste. AFKAR is a mix of mosques and monorails, AK-47s and Arab satellites, a propaganda organ for a new intelligentsia, who fancy themselves the avant-garde for an OPEC-financed global Islamic rebirth. Their writers are smart, fluent, furiously angry, and fanatically determined to build a future "neither East nor West." They mean business.

SOUTH, The Magazine of the Third World, Suite 319, 230 Park Avenue, NYNY 10169, US$28/yr., also 13th Floor, New Zealand House, 80 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4TS. Western media ignore Third Worlders unless they're either starving, or shooting Americans. Yet the curves of demographics and economic growth prove that the developing nations will wield an ever-growing influence in years to come. This is an excellent magazine, authoritative, well-written, with superior graphics. It covers Third World politics, finance, technology, and the arts, always with mind-opening perspectives. It is neither militant nor Marxist, yet doesn't cater to comfortable Yankee prejudice. Highly recommended.

WORLD PRESS REVIEW, Box 915, Farmingdale, NY 11737, $19.95/yr. WPR is a summary of "news and views from the foreign press," most of them devoted to nervous assessments of what the rest of the world thinks of the US. "Moscow Beat" and "Asia/Pacific Beat" are especially intriguing. Its interest in economic issues gives it a forecaster's outlook useful to investors, speculators -- and extrapolators.

CHEAP TRUTH 809-C West 12th Street, Austin, Texas 78701 U.S.A. NOT COPYRIGHTED. Vincent Omniaveritas, editing. Todd Refinery, graphics. "Bored with the Apocalypse"

WHOLE EARTH REVIEW, 27 Gate Five Road, Sausalito, CA 94965, US$18/yr. This periodical, formerly COEVOLUTION QUARTERLY, has gone through a marvelous sea-change. From tired old '60's tech hippies they have now become shiny new '80's hip techies, a much more palatable breed. They have published THE WHOLE EARTH SOFTWARE CATALOG, possibly the best book ever written for the layman about the promise and peril of personal computers. Even the earnest, dirt-stained, denim CQ was always good for a shot of uplift and optimism; now, equipped with red-hot com technology, they are like hardened jungle guerillas suddenly armed with Stealth bombers. These Green, eco-decentralist cadres may have underestimated the opposition in their struggle to create a sustainable, humanized society. But they suddenly have a big new chunk of loose change and a new constituency revolted by recent callous excesses against the environment. Exciting things are going to come from this magazine, and though their utopian schemes will almost certainly fail they will still have a strong role in shaping the future.

THE PLANETARY REPORT (journal of The Planetary Society) 110 S. Euclid Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101 (available with membership). A very interesting ideological struggle is taking shape within this slim little propaganda mag. The Planetary Society is Carl Sagan's pressure group for space exploration. The civilian scientific intelligentsia behind this publication are apparently nauseated by military ambitions in space. They have opened their membership to Soviet space scientists, thereby gaining in their last issue an incredible coup of previously unreleased Venusian surface photos. With the recent "nuclear winter" flap, Sagan and his ideological allies have gone to the barricades against what they perceive as crypto-Christian jingoistic Neanderthals in high office. Rarely do scientists speak out with this kind of media savvy, and they appear to have struck a chord. These people are not to be underestimated, despite their painful habit of talking down to their audience and their occasional excesses in mystic scientism (of the "Our DNA Must Reach The Stars" variety). And if their privately financed radiotelescope Search for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence, by some cosmic mischance, should happen to deliver, well, all bets are off.

We now yield the floor to a worthy comrade in the globe-spanning network of CHEAP TRUTH shills. Leaping from ambush behind the smoking office xerox, it's that two-fisted voice of reason, Your Friendly Editor, Mark Theroux.

GRIPE TIME

You people out there think that all science fiction editors do is talk on the phone, go to lunch, and attend conventions. Not so. Large amounts of time are spent coddling and placating writers who want to know "when are you going to run my stuff," "do you think anyone will like it?", "I'm stuck in the middle..." etc. (You know who you are.)

That's okay, it's what we're here for. What editors hate is ungratefulness. Take for example the author with whom I spent hours of office time going over a ms that had potential. I felt sorry for the writer because he was only in town for a few days. I liked the story and it was a slow day.

The rewrite didn't work and I rejected the story. Never got a thanks. Next time I heard of that writer he's making a big public stink.

Or how about the writer who asked for, begged for editorial comments on his ms. I wrote a three-page editorial letter, single-spaced, made suggestions, and what did I get back? A two-page personally and professionally insulting harangue criticising my solicited comments.

Another time, I asked someone for a change in the beginning of a story. The author said sure. I got back the ms with the same beginning but with a different ending (worse than the original). I'm convinced that some writers cannot hear what editors say (and you know who you are, too).

Or how about the writers whose prose cannot be touched without permission. Don't change a comma, period, colon or misspelling -- or else!

I don't care how long you've been writing or how famous you are, you can't be objective about your own work. Stephen King is a prime example. Yeah, he's successful but boy, does he need an editor. Someone who can spot the inconsistencies, the repetition, the lapses of logic in plot or characterization. Editors aren't trying to destroy your words, your thoughts, or your reputations, you paranoid idiots. They're trying their damnedest to make a good piece of work better, a potentially great story or novel live up to that potential. That's what a good editor can do. Really, we're on your side.

JAN 7 - 1985

CHEAP TRUTH Electronic Letter
Column (512) UFO-SMOF
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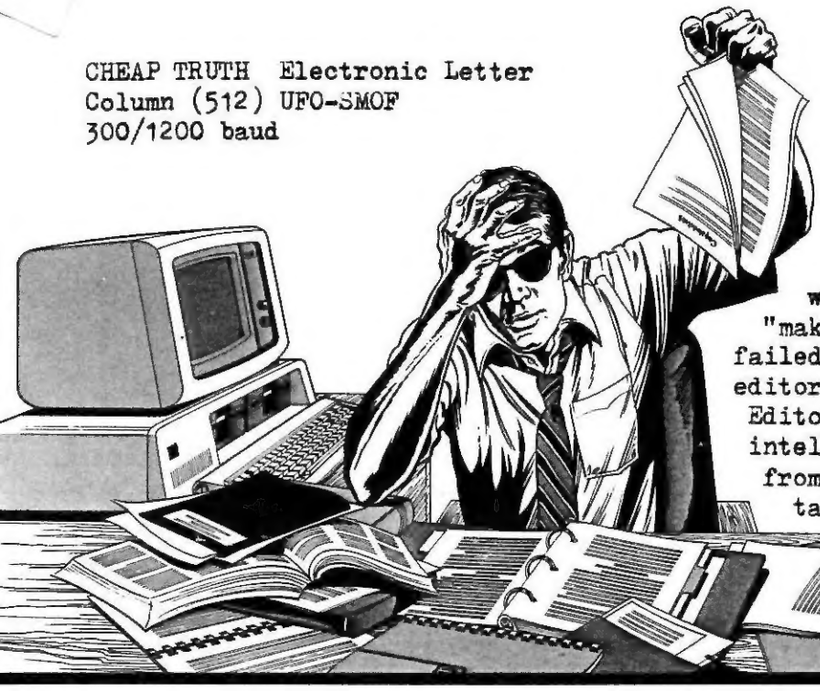

Title: HOWDY VINCE From: Chuck
Date: 01-26-85
Re CT 9. Trust you will not open your newsletter to further petty whining from self-styled taste arbiters miffed at "uppity writers." True, "Friendly Editor," we "difficult writers" know who we are... but do you really know who YOU are, "trying your damnedest" to "make our work better"? How many writers are failed editors? Few, or none. But how many editors are failed writers?
Editors, with a few rare exeptions, are mediocre intellects hoping to achieve second-hand glory from discovering and interfering with creative talent that they lack and envy. Their regular paycheck fosters more loyalty to job tenure than to literature. Thus much great work, and almost all innovation, is blocked rather than enhanced; and an editor of this ilk is not intellectually qualified to comprehend the issues raised in CHEAP TRUTH, let alone comment on them. Kindly reserve your organ for intellectual idealism, not middlebrow carpings demanding more "respect" from the exploited.

Best wishes from your buddy, CHUCK

Title: LANGUAGE From: anonymous Date: 01-29-85

It's all very well to be vitriolic, critical, and hit below the belt, I like the controversy. But REALLY!

Reading Mr. O's zine brought to mind the quaint prose babbled by the self-styled beatniks of the '50's in smoke-filled basements-cum-cafes. We're supposed to think this multisyllable nonsense is the height of Avant-Garde. Are the big words there to make us think it carries more weight than otherwise? Does Mr. Omniaveritas really TALK like that?

Title: CT#5 From: Glen Cox Date: 02-05-85
Vincent, We at Warner Brothers would like to thank you for the wonderful review of MTV in your fanzine CHEAP TRUTH. More people like you are needed to explain the surrealism of the underlying metaphors of such great videos as KARMA CHAMELEON and DANCING WITH MYSELF. Please try to get a Tuesday night free next month so you can be the next Guest VJ. We want you to explain the Marxism behind every one of Duran Duran's videos to date.

Sincerely yours, Glen (for Empty V)

Title: LETTER BY U.S. MAIL From: Pat Cadigan Date: 02-09-85
Dear V.O. of C.T.,

Yeah, when you're running a magazine without staples, you have to make up in substance what you lack in overhead.

I applaud your motives. Good luck and I hope you can avoid being seduced by clubbiness, being "famous", and believing too much in the hype; taking one's self more seriously than the work; stuff like that. Beware of the fact that all movements, no matter how benign, tend to breed storm troopers. Above all, to thine own self be true and it follows as the night the day... well, you know.

I am not a cyberhead and have only a dim idea what all that stuff is about (in my case "cyberpunk" should read "more punk than cyber").

Life is funny. Don't forget to laugh. Frankie says "Relax", and all that. Cheers, PAT CADIGAN

Title: MTV? HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH! From: Denis Loubet Date: 02-09-85

Oh, surrre, Vincent, the 12- and 14-year-old Heavy-Metal mainliners all get the subtle socio-political commentary and daring, visionary, SF influence from such gems of the genre as the oceanically apocalyptic KARMA CHAMELEON. The Ozzy Osbourn crowd gasps, not in glee at Ozzy's vocal virtuosity, heavens no, they crave the delicate shadings of Ozzy's techno-rapport with new wave mainstream science fiction.

Oh boy, I can use big words too.

Sorry, Mr. V, all I see on MTV is the use of video special effects, some good, some bad, to add flash to the audio portion. A lot of effects are out-of-place in the videos, and annoying trends are rampant.

For instance, it seems that EVERY future world is covered in busted machines, with rejects from THE ROAD WARRIOR wandering around preying on each other for spare parts to eat. Some are — get this visionary touch — tied to windmills, or locked in cages. A lot of times, these downtrodden new-wave clotheshorses are freed from mindless drudgery by the hero of the piece. (This conveniently being the lead vocalist. Always!) Boy! I just love all these fresh ideas, don't you?

Come on, Vincent, you can't be serious.

Title: REPLY TO DENIS From: Vincent Omniaveritas Date: 02-12-85
Hey Denis? How's this for serious?

Last year ANALOG lost 12 percent of its circulation.

ASIMOV'S lost 25 percent of its readership and dropped to its lowest circulation ever.

AMAZING is read by less that 11,000 people, probably the smallest figure ever for a professional SF magazine. If it drops below 10,000, SFWA's own rules will have to officially reclassify it as a fanzine!

And MTV is the number one cable channel on the continent.

What's the reason, Denis? Two very serious reasons, man. First, these mags have been so damned dull that they lack even the pop glitter of some of MTV's worst. And the second reason is the arrogant complacency of editors, writers, and certain fans who will remain nameless.

Title: LETTER RE CT 3 From: Patrick Nielsen-Hayden Date: 02-14-85
(((Editor's note: Patrick and Teresa Nielsen-Hayden publish the print fanzine IZZARD, at 75 Fairview #2B, New York, NY 10040, at $2/issue or 3 for $5.)))
Dear Mr. O:

New IZZARD coming out real soon now, you bet; otherwise, swamped at the slook mills of New York publishing biz.

Which reminds me to pass on a bit of egoboo from one of my co-editors at Chelsea House Books, one S.T. Joshi, the closest person extant to a successor to August Derleth (he's published several zillion words of HPLcrit, a couple of weighty bibliographies, and is currently editing the definitive version of Lovecraft's fictional output for Arkham House, going back to the original manuscripts). Reading the Lovecraft interview, he smiled, chuckled, snorted, rolled around on the floor a few times, and solemnly informed me it was "very true-to-life." There you go.

Pavoot, PATRICK NIELSEN HAYDEN

Title: Re CT 5 From: Denis Loubet Date: 02-16-85

I just finished reading CT#5. What utter rubbish! "Oh dear, oh my, I do so hate the books my Mom and Pop read," Sue Denim whines. "Those dolphins are so cute," she smirks. Well, dammit, I read STARTIDE RISING and liked it a lot. All the aspects she found objectionable failed to keep me from enjoying the book. A "good" book does not REQUIRE explicit sex scenes. They ten to distract one from the story line, besides creating a weak spot in the binding. A "good" book should not require what some might consider foul language. And what the hell is wrong with the "humans'll win 'cause we're better" plotline? It IS about the oldest line in SF, I'll admit, but still viable. And reasonable, given the universe Brin has created. It's satisfying to read.

On to other pastures. Have you considered the idea that maybe the kids watch MTV because it's EASY? You don't have to have any imagination. You needn't have an IQ over two digits. You don't even have to know how to read. Have you considered the idea that it might be the dying educational system that's responsible for the lagging sales? These kids CAN'T READ! What the hell are they going to do with a copy of ANALOG? Smoke it? Christ, if you wrote SF to appeal to THAT audience, it would have to be in less than three letter words at first grade level. That ain't ANY kind of SF!

I pray that some good might come of it all. Maybe the kids'll pick up on the odd high-tech/spaceflight slant of MTV. Whether this will push them towards an education, or merely instill the desire for a better digital-audio ghetto-blaster I don't know. But I have an uneasy feeling...

Is that what you're looking for?

Title: SUE DENIM PICKS UP THE GAUNTLET From: Sue Denim Date: 02-17-85

Glad somebody noticed that I am NOT Vince. The opinions of the reviewers in CT belong to those reviewers alone (this is truer than I meant, unfortunately).

Denis and Information Monster both get the creepy-crawlies when people in their SF novels talk like real people or behave like real people. I realize that the combined sexual experience of most of you would amount to less running time than the average TV sitcom, but us folks in the real world get laid as a basic part of our existence. It's IMPORTANT to us.

This relates to the subject of David Brin as follows: Yes, we can learn a lot about a relationship by listening to the participants talk. IF it's a genuine relationship. The ones in STARTIDE RISING are phony, childish, and unbelievable. Also, if we're going to hear them talk, then let's by god HEAR them. Don't tell me somebody "muttered an oath." That's the writer stepping in and saying, "Cover your ears, children, you shouldn't hear this." Personally I prefer to make that sort of judgement for myself.

Also you can learn a hell of a lot about characters from watching them fuck. Provided they have the apparatus (which Brin's characters didn't seem to) and aren't just smooth plastic, like Barbie and Ken.

Vince has his ideas about good SF and I have mine. What I like, besides good writing and fresh ideas, are believable characters. By this I don't mean the bronzed supermen of STARTIDE RISING, but characters who live in the kind of illogical, antagonistic world that I live in. Philip Dick comes immediately to mind, so does J. G. Ballard, so does Kate Wilhelm. I also (gasp) read a lot of stuff that ISN'T SF — Robert Stone, Jayne Anne Phillips, Thomas McGuane, stuff that wouldn't do you guys any harm to try.

I also like MTV. Not because it makes such a great appeal to the intellect (as all you Piers "Robot" Anthony fans keep pointing out) but because the best videos work VISUALLY, which is the point. It's the last bastion of surrealism, and who cares whether a 13-year-old in parachute pants "understands" it the way all us ivory-tower intellectuals do? It's a living medium, people watch it, and without that minimum any art form is going to die. And remember Sturgeon's Law, for Christ's sake, 95% of everything is crap, and for every piece of shit Def Leppard video there's a lousy SF novel or a lousy mainstream novel, fo that matter. Don't attack an entire medium for its worst examples, but look at what the potentials are and what the creative people are doing with them.

Finally, don't sneer at people whose vocabularies are better than your own. Words are the basic tools of this medium, and if yours aren't very good, maybe you should try to get them sharpened.

Love and kisses, SUE (Ms. Denim, to you)